The Spanish-American War is often referred to as the first "media war." During the 1890s, journalism that sensationalized—and sometimes even manufactured—dramatic events was a powerful force that helped propel the United States into war with Spain. Led by newspaper owners William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, journalism of the 1890s used melodrama, romance, and hyperbole to sell millions of newspapers--a style that became known as yellow journalism.

The term yellow journalism came from a popular New York World comic called "Hogan's Alley," which featured a yellow-dressed character named the "the yellow kid." Determined to compete with Pulitzer's World in every way, rival New York Journal owner William Randolph Hearst copied Pulitzer's sensationalist style and even hired "Hogan's Alley" artist R.F. Outcault away from the World. In response, Pulitzer commissioned another cartoonist to create a second yellow kid. Soon, the sensationalist press of the 1890s became a competition between the "yellow kids," and the journalistic style was coined "yellow journalism."

Yellow journals like the New York Journal and the New York World relied on sensationalist headlines to sell newspapers. William Randolph Hearst understood that a war with Cuba would not only sell his papers, but also move him into a position of national prominence. From Cuba, Hearst's star reporters wrote stories designed to tug at the heartstrings of Americans. Horrific tales described the situation in Cuba--female prisoners, executions, valiant rebels fighting, and starving women and children figured in many of the stories that filled the newspapers. But it was the sinking of the battleship Maine in Havana Harbor that gave Hearst his big story--war. After the sinking of the Maine, the Hearst newspapers, with no evidence, unequivocally blamed the Spanish, and soon U.S. public opinion demanded intervention.

Today, historians point to the Spanish-American War as the first press-driven war. Although it may be an exaggeration to claim that Hearst and the other yellow journalists started the war, it is fair to say that the press fueled the public's passion for war. Without sensational headlines and stories about Cuban affairs, the mood for Cuban intervention may have been very different. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the United States emerged as a world power, and the U.S. press proved its influence.

7th Grade – Unit 4 – Module; Causes and Effects of the Spanish American War, VB. Obj. 7.4.3 (yellow journalism)

http://www.pbs.org/crucible/frames/\_journalism.html